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# Lessons from the UNU Panel Series on Academic Thinking on Migration

Report from five panels co-organised by the United Nations University  
(UNU) Migration Network and the UNU Office in New York

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

For the first time in history, in September 2016, Heads of State and Government discussed migration and refugee issues at a dedicated session of the UN General Assembly. This sent an important political message to the world: that such matters are now high up the international agenda.

In the 'New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants', adopted 19 September 2016, the 193 UN Member States recognised the need for a comprehensive approach to human mobility and improved cooperation at the global level. Member States specifically committed to:

- protect the safety, dignity and human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migratory status, and at all times;
- support countries rescuing, receiving and hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants;
- integrate migrants – addressing their needs and capacities as well as those of receiving communities – in humanitarian and development assistance frameworks and planning;
- combat xenophobia, racism and discrimination towards all migrants;
- develop, through a state-led process, non-binding principles and voluntary guidelines on the treatment of migrants in vulnerable situations;
- strengthen global governance of migration, including by bringing IOM into the UN family and through the development of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration; and
- develop an additional global compact on refugees<sup>2</sup>.

By adopting the Declaration, the General Assembly committed itself to develop a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. This in turn led to a series of intergovernmental consultations, which began in early 2017 and which are set to culminate in the planned adoption of the compact at an intergovernmental conference, to be held in December 2018. The major elements and timeline of these negotiations are set out in a Modalities Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 6 April 2017 (A/71/L.58).

The global compact is an opportunity to improve the governance of migration, while addressing the challenges of contemporary migration. It may also be used to reinforce and recognise the contribution of migrants – and of the migration process – to sustainable development.

Produced through an open, transparent and inclusive process of consultations and negotiations, the global compact will draw from civil society, the private sector, academic

institutions, parliaments, diaspora communities, and migrant organisations in both the intergovernmental conference and its preparatory process.

Against the backdrop of six informal thematic consultations, linked to different aspects of the global compact, the United Nations University (UNU) Office at the United Nations in New York and the UNU Migration Network<sup>3</sup> jointly convened the 'UNU Panel Series on Academic Thinking on Migration', with the generous support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The series brought together leading researchers in the field of migration from around the world to discuss current scholarly thinking on several topics: the rise of nationalist politics and policy implications for migration; the linkages between climate change and migration, including forced migration and community relocations; inclusion of migrants and refugees in urban areas; protection of women's rights, with a focus on women migrant workers; and emerging research on migration for development.

Experts in each panel offered recommendations for policy makers working towards a global compact on migration. In the next section of the executive summary, each of these panels and their recommendations are briefly summarized. In the following section, more detailed summaries of each panel and associated recommendations are offered.

### Brief Summaries of the Panels & Recommendations

#### The Rise of Nationalist Politics and Policy Implications for Migration

From different academic perspectives, this seminar examined the dynamics in which nationalism and xenophobia arise. Scholars on the panel considered, in the context of difficult political climates, how groups seeking greater inclusivity might redress divisive politics. Recommendations are offered to governments and local administrators seeking to combat xenophobia and to promote inclusion. Inclusion here refers to both migrants and people who feel 'left out' of globalisation and who support nativist movements in certain parts of the world.

Panellists noted that within discussions towards a global compact on migration, countries of destination can work more closely with countries of origin and transit to:

- Increase and create regular channels and avoid detention policies that contribute to the criminalisation of migrants.
- Better prepare migrants and 'host' communities for integration, through targeted education and community

engagement programming.

- Address the structural causes of forced migration and ensure migration is a choice, not a necessity.

In addition, to create impact in the long term, panellists suggested countries can:

- Generate and implement ways to share economic success and hardship evenly among people in a country.
- Create mechanisms to better inform citizens about the benefits of multilateral and intergovernmental institutions, globalism and global capital, and migration.
- Address the root causes of populist viewpoints by tackling what leads people towards the scapegoating of migrants, while separating violent prejudice, xenophobia and racism from the legitimate concerns and criticisms of citizens.

In the short- and medium-term, governments can:

- Support intercultural education programmes for 'native' populations as well as migrants and refugees.
- Encourage greater engagement of migrants and refugees in the news media, to showcase the positive contributions of migrants to counter-act the harmful narratives around migration.

Panellists expressed optimism that xenophobia can be successfully addressed today in multiple public 'spheres' in which members of the public intersect: virtually; in community forum designed for public engagement and discussion; in the public discourse of different levels of the polity realm; and in education- and faith-based centres.

### **Climate Change and Human Mobility: New Perspectives on Climate and Migration, Displacement and Relocation**

Human mobility, climate change and the environment are interrelated. While relatively new in the field of migration studies, the implications of this complex nexus have been considered by scholars and practitioners for over a decade. This seminar considered several issues related to how climatic and environmental changes interact with human mobility through the findings from empirical studies in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, North America and South America. Panellists offered expertise on different types of mobility that may be affected by climatic and environmental changes, namely migration, displacement and planned relocation, as well as to the reasons why people affected by the same stimuli do not migrate.

To address slow-onset environmental degradation and 'distress migration', governments and international organisations can:

- Invest in land restoration irrigation projects to reduce the pressures of climate variability and dryness that can precipitate movement by livelihood-stressed populations.
- Better invest development aid; for example, by

mainstreaming migration into development projects and ensuring a longer-term climate lens is taken in resilience-building projects.

- Ensure policy coherence of development interventions, to avoid unintended and perverse effects that lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions and/or vulnerability, while maximising benefits for target populations.

The risks of forced migration resulting from climate change impacts, such as social disarticulation and immobility, disproportionately affect island and coastal communities. In a global compact on migration, countries can:

- Commit to build on regional and bottom-up approaches, particularly where customary law may prevail over other types of law.
- Assure the right to stay, the right to land and resource use, and the continuity of community rights.
- Commit at the regional and global level to support adaptation financing and support, for example, for National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).
- Reinforce institutional and infrastructural development to reduce livelihood vulnerability to natural hazards.

To reconcile the disconnect between the current body of research and policy making in this field, scholars and policy makers can both:

- Better integrate policy viewpoints in multiple stages of project design and development and be clearer about respective priorities.
- Encourage involvement by the private sector, particularly in terms of meeting the technical and financial challenges of climate change adaptation.
- Support more interdisciplinary and longitudinal research on the complex and multi-causal links between climate change and human mobility, including: the indirect impacts of climate change on other drivers of migration; on differential risk exposure and vulnerability within and among communities affected by similar hazards; on the changing temporality of movements; on *immobility*; and on if and how large-scale migratory flows can be reversed.

Panellists cautioned against directly and deterministically associating migration with climate change, but supported efforts to translate global climate phenomena into regional or local level impacts.

### **Cities of Welcome: Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Urban Areas**

This panel gathered experts from diverse backgrounds to explore questions related to the inclusion and integration of migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees in cities around the world. Panellists discussed examples of cities looking to cultivate a 'culture of welcome'. This term loosely refers to a culture that fosters an appreciation of and empathy for the situations asylum seekers and refugees

find themselves in, provides them with safety, and seeks to welcome them into active participation in community life.

Panellists discussed ways that cities, independently from national prerogatives, can play a role in terms of welcoming documented and undocumented migrants and ensuring their access to urban life, community spaces, and services. Fostering a 'culture of welcome' was described as a complex matter of enacting policies to protect the human rights of migrants, for which municipal governments may have central roles, ideally supported by national authorities. Panellists noted that in some circumstances, particularly those in which the authorities are perceived to be potentially hostile, migrants and refugees may not self-identify as such and may prefer to remain 'invisible'.

Considering these points, panellists suggested governments:

- Promote policies that encourage migrant and refugee integration into labour markets, as well as entrepreneurship of all urban citizens.
- Promote economic and (formal) financial inclusion of all communities.
- Embrace transnationality and multi-locality, not just as a fact but as a positive, enriching element of citizens' lives and of urban identities.

To foster the environment in which such policies can be successful, the panel suggested municipal and national governments, as well as all urban citizens:

- Look at places rather than people, meaning fully integrating migrant and 'host' communities in areas of origin, transit and destination in planning and implementing in policies and programmes integration and inclusion.
- Promote and encourage a 'culture of welcome' within spaces where the reach of governmental programmes may be limited, and to thus not only look at 'the city' as a singular entity but to work with and recognise the diversity and heterogeneity of communities, voices, actors and forms of governance at the urban level in different contexts across the world.

### **Addressing Women's Rights in a Global Compact on Migration**

This multi-disciplinary panel identified actions and strategies that member states and other stakeholders can take to promote and protect women's human rights in migration governance. The panel also identified interventions that enable or constrain women's enjoyment of their human rights, both among those who migrate and those who stay behind.

Members of the panel reflected on how states can best develop gender-responsive, human rights-based migration policies which recognise the choices women make in migration, promote their empowerment and leadership, and move away from addressing migrant women primarily

through a lens of passive victimhood.

Panellists underlined several key recommendations, focusing on points that could be integrated into a global compact on migration:

- Dispense with exclusively or predominantly portraying women on the move as victims (of trafficking), poor and vulnerable, or involved in criminality (migrant smuggled).
- Recognise and normalise migrant women as agents for development and growth of the societies they bridge.
- Enact policies to support women migrants in making choices through the migration cycle by, for instance, providing resources such as a basic income, a social protection regime for those who are left behind in their countries of origin, and basic safety across migration corridors.
- Support migrants' education and access to information to enhance access to accurate information about labour opportunities, access to adequate housing, care for children and elderly relatives, freedom of movement and possibilities for return.
- Promote education and higher-skill development programmes specifically for women and girls.
- Improve legal protections and access to justice for migrant women, particularly those in certain sectors and industry.
- Improve data measurement tools and consistency of data measurement across member states, to help reduce the invisibility of some migrant women.

### **Alternative Ways of Thinking about Migration for Development: Lessons from Emerging Research**

New global realities warrant taking stock of new ways of thinking about the relationship between migration and sustainable development, pushing the limits of knowledge on the role of migration in promoting skills transfers, in addressing global labour market imbalances, and in enhancing the benefits of globalisation. This event encouraged discussion, in particular, on: the socio-economic effects of the increasing magnitude of migration between developing countries (South-South migration); the contribution of refugees to the infrastructure, economies, and social fabric of their host communities; the factors and behavioural biases that influence financial decision-making of migrants; and how regional structures supporting freedom of movement affect their access to labour opportunities, services and rights.

Overall, panellists suggested that it is time to dispense with the perception of 'managing migration' as dirty words, insofar as 'managing migration' is not perceived by governments as synonymous with 'reducing' migration. Migration can be better harnessed to deliver on the sustainable development agenda.

For a global compact on migration, panellists suggested governments develop strategies to:

- Lower the barriers to (legal) migration, for example by lowering the financial costs of recruitment and of the migration journey.
- Ensure greater information sharing and awareness raising about economic opportunities for both hosting and hosted communities – and about employment opportunities and the risks involved in migration – for example, through modern communications tools and strategies.
- Improve the right to work for both refugees and migrants, and portability of rights, which are prerequisites to ensuring the full potential of migration to expand economies.
- Enact sounder development strategies that include mainstreaming migration and/or scaling-up relevant projects into development planning.

In terms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on migration ‘management’, panellists suggested countries that are traditionally migrant-sending and those that are traditionally migrant-receiving work together – with the support of partners in civil society and the private sector - to:

- Jointly formulate migration-related policies, whether bilateral, multilateral, or global in nature (or all of the above).
- Recognise and promote awareness of the important economic contributions and human growth potential delivered through transnational families, social remittances, knowledge transfers, while embracing entrepreneurial, investor and philanthropic migrants.
- Ensure communities around the world can access and integrate into credit markets, for example, by promoting the availability of and access to microfinance and financial tools such as mobile wallets.

In development cooperation and aid programmes targeting the ‘root causes’ of migration, governments can:

- Promote sharing of information which should be clear and transparent to refugees and migrants.
- Engage ‘host’ communities early and often in development and aid programming.
- Recognise and promote awareness of refugees as important economic agents, while ensuring their economic empowerment.

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<sup>2</sup> The process towards a global compact on refugees is not a focus of this report and related panel series. For more information, please see: [refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact](https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact)

<sup>3</sup> The UNU Migration Network is a research platform across institutes of the UNU that shares expertise on migration from different disciplinary perspectives. See: [migration.unu.edu](https://migration.unu.edu)

## DETAILED PANEL SUMMARIES

### The Rise of Nationalist Politics and Policy Implications for Migration

20 April 2017

#### Panellists:

- Dr Valeria Bello, Research Fellow at the United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM), author of *International Migration and International Security: Why Prejudice is a Global Security Threat*
- Dr Belachew Gebrewold, Professor of International Security at Innsbruck University and Head of Studies at the Innsbruck Management Centre, author of *Africa and Fortress Europe: threats and opportunities*
- Dr Gavasa Maluleke, Post-doctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam, author of *Women's Voices in South-South Migration: Exposing Salient Forms of Xenophobia and Negotiated Ways of Belonging in South Africa*
- Dr Nasar Meer, Professor of Race, Identity and Citizenship at the University of Edinburgh, author of *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: The Rise of Muslim Consciousness*

#### Moderators:

- Dr Melissa Siegel, Professor and Head of Migration Studies at United Nations University - Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT)
- Dr James Cockayne, Head of the United Nations University (UNU) Office in New York

#### Introduction

From different academic perspectives, this seminar examined the dynamics in which nationalism and xenophobia arise. Scholars on the panel considered, in the context of difficult political climates, how groups seeking greater inclusivity might redress divisive politics.

The panel addressed the main reasons behind a recent increase in anti-migrant violence in some contexts – and why some countries experience a rise in anti-migrant sentiment while others, including countries that observe similar migration patterns, do not. The discussion explored how current xenophobic and nationalist groups use anti-migration rhetoric, as well as what can be learned from historical examples. The overall aim was to consider how policies at the sub-national, national, regional and global levels may variously be used to tackle prejudice, xenophobia and racism.

#### *Commonalities Among Nativist and Xenophobic Movements*

Panellists highlighted the ongoing disconnect between research findings and the public narrative. Research shows that migration is overwhelmingly positive, yet some people – and narratives both in the public discourse of the polity realm and in the media – continue to negatively portray the phenomenon. Some anti-migrant narratives perpetuate the false assumption that migrants *take away* from communities of destination, and that by sharing a country and culture with them, the communities of destination lose something of themselves. This idea assumes that migrants have nothing to contribute. Yet, most empirical research shows that migration makes innumerable and often unquantifiable contributions to societies, economies, and cultures. These impacts also have emerging properties; the result of migration is greater than the sum of its parts.

Panellists brought specific evidence to the fore to argue that a rise in prejudice only occurs in communities where people do not hold intercultural values. In the context of economic or social discontent, professional ‘scapegoaters’ – particularly those with far-right or populist political agendas – target migrants, casting them as an amorphous and homogenous group, and as the source of many woes. According to research comparing the situation of many countries around the world, where growing migrant populations happened concurrently with cuts to social welfare – which are typically felt first in the poor districts that are both most reliant on them and where most frequently migrant populations concentrate – unscrupulous leaders could scapegoat the presence of migrants.

Panellists noted that most members of societies are tolerant towards migrants and migration in general. Yet the focus in the media is often on the negative more than the positive. Although a higher percentage of migrants combined with recession in a society can contribute to prejudice, this happens only when people do not hold and strengthen intercultural values and dialogue.

In relation to recent political developments, particularly in Europe, panellists noted that anti-pluralist and anti-multiculturalist populism has thrived in part because leaders there have been able to argue for homogeneity and identify themselves with the preservation of ‘one nation, one people’. In other words, such leaders claim to be legitimate representatives of the group, embodying the principle of the *vox populi vox dei* (voice of the people, voice of God). However, the clearly defined and indivisible people, language, culture and history they claim to represent does not truly exist. Culture, people and languages are not static but they are alive, mobile and evolve together with the development of societies. Ethnic heterogeneity has been the norm throughout history. The idea of static, homogenous ethno-cultural groups is simply an extension of nation-building myths that cover a far more complex reality. However, not all forms of nation-

building are based on exclusive patterns, which makes an important difference when countering racism, xenophobia and prejudice more generally.

Anti-pluralism and anti-multiculturalism are regularly observed cultural features of nativist, or right-wing populist, movements and are two characteristics common to such movements in Europe and beyond.

Politically, anti-foreigner movements and occasional violence are linked to anti-establishment attitudes. Those who follow this right-wing ideology often believe that they are unrepresented and they consider themselves as good, 'simple', and hard-working people, while casting mainstream politicians and intellectuals as corrupt elites ignoring people's interests.

Finally, economically, they intend to represent anti-capitalistic and anti-systemic nationalism. They argue that their future and lives are unstable and unpredictable in the face of rapid socio-economic change especially caused by the influx of refugees competing with their social benefits. As a result, they scapegoat globalisation, capitalism, the United Nations, EU-institutions, and migrants for increasing difficulties that citizens competing in global markets and institutions face.

These points were elucidated through examples of right-wing populism in Europe and with the counter-example of Scotland, where multiculturalism has been embraced. No political party that has any representation in Scotland has made migration an electoral issue. Panellists argued that the non-politicisation of migration can help lead to a consensus, suggesting that Scottish politicians talk about nationhood rather than ethnicity. Meanwhile, Scottish political elites tend to support the view that 'Scottishness' is an open identity. Rather than embracing the rhetoric of invasion that has pervaded elsewhere, which alienates minorities and sows divisiveness, Scottish politicians have challenged their people to remake the nation and meaning of 'Scottishness'.

The panel discussed how women may experience xenophobia differently than men. Considering women with a migration experience – that is, women who have a migrant family member, and not migrant women only - panellists noted the salience of gender in the construction and perpetuation of xenophobia. Outbreaks of violence in some contexts, it could be suggested, tend to be centred around masculine energy. The accounts on the side of the perpetrators of violence is of migrants 'stealing [our] women'. Protestors accuse migrants of fostering prostitution, which boils down to the fear that 'native' women are being violated. Migrants are commonly characterised as 'stealing' jobs, which relates to a perceived threat to a key (pre-industrial) symbol of masculinity. Migrants are also accused of bringing drugs into the country, which can be related to a fear of one's failure to protect their children. At the same time, violence towards women - including migrant women - is relatively common. Much of the focus on migrant

women has been on their vulnerability and exposure to violence. More work should focus on the interplay between masculinity and xenophobic violence to paint a clearer picture of the roots of xenophobia and its presence in everyday life.

Panellists offered a case study of xenophobia and its linkages to masculinity in South Africa. In South Africa, anti-migrant narratives and xenophobic violence are typically directed towards Black African foreigners. Because much of the media focus around xenophobia tends to centre around outbreaks of violence, the media may miss out on the everyday lived experiences that belie systematic and institutionalised xenophobia. These are as important to understand as isolated outbreaks of violence.

Research shows that among women with a 'migration experience' in South Africa, women married to foreign nationals often feel ostracised or marginalised by other South Africans (both men and women). Among interviewees, foreign African women were especially likely to recount experiences of racism. However, both foreign and South African women married to foreigners lamented their inability to protect their children from xenophobia in their daily lives. While racism, classism, and education are historically important in flare-ups of anti-migrant sentiments, xenophobia cuts across race, class, and age. Worryingly, masculinity and tunnel-vision media focus may be feeding xenophobic undercurrents.

#### *Reversing Anti-Migrant Narratives*

Panellists and audience members echoed the need to change the narrative on migration to a positive, evidence-based one. It is important for certain countries to promote and implement lessons from other countries that have success stories with migration, to emphasise the refugee and migrant dividend.

It was discussed that the persistence of anti-migrant, xenophobic narratives is not for lack of evidence, but a non-acceptance of evidence, as well as the continued use of xenophobic narratives by politicians seeking to capture popular discontent and scapegoat migrants to advance their own agendas. While economic downturn and other sources of discontent – cuts to social services and education, which disproportionately affect poorer populations who interact more frequently with migrants – are associated with a rise in prejudicial attitudes, the rise only occurs in places that do not hold intercultural values. Furthermore, such sentiments accrue when those most affected by cuts to public policy are also those who feel 'left out' of globalisation. Because of this, a long-term solution is to emphasise that nations prosper when they include everyone, and not just the few. Panellists cautioned against portraying the 'left behind' as the problem, as indeed middle-class actors have been influential in recent events and low-income groups often have low levels of political participation. Importantly, the panellists underlined that the welfare of migrants and the concerns of poor citizens are not mutually exclusive.

Panellists lamented the 'climate of criminalisation of

migration' in different parts of the world. Governments should find methods to more positively govern migration in ways that can create and strengthen the conditions for migrants to positively contribute to societies they reach, rather than pushing them into informal, unsafe routes. The panel argued that when safe, legal pathways for migration are limited, criminalising migration - ascribing 'criminality' and threats to migrants while enforcing a climate of fear for undocumented migrants - does not stop migration flows. Instead, it may have the effect of increasing business for illicit migrant smugglers.

#### *Recommendations*

Panellists offered several suggestions for governments and local administrators to combat xenophobia and promote inclusion, both of migrants and the people who feel 'left out' of globalisation and who have recently supported nativist movements in certain parts of the world.

Intercultural education programmes for natives as well as migrants and refugees can help improve integration and inclusion in the short and longer term.

In addition, it is important to showcase the positive contributions of migrants to counter-act the harmful narratives around migration. Countries of destination can work more closely with countries of origin to prepare migrants for integration and to work on the structural causes of migration, to ensure that migration is a choice, along with the right to stay and return. Countries should increase and create regular channels and avoid detention policies that contribute to the criminalisation of migrants.

Countries must generate ways to share economic success and hardship evenly among people in a country. To address long-term and more deeply complex issues, panellists suggested countries generate ways to share economic hardship (and success) evenly among people in a country. Addressing the weaknesses of global capital: the ideology that interconnecting markets and the pursuit of wealth in a free market would trickle down as long as everyone embraced capitalism is not working for all. There are many losers and some gainers. Without social, political and economic intervention, such ideology has not been working and continues to destabilise peoples and countries everywhere.

Panellists highlighted that it is important not to ignore or dismiss populists as intellectually or morally misguided. While it may be difficult at times to separate violent prejudice and racism from the legitimate concerns and criticisms of citizens, the latter must be taken seriously. In terms of anti-globalist sentiment, governments and international institutions can do more to inform citizens about the benefits of multilateral and intergovernmental institutions, globalism and global capital, and migration.

Panellists advocated for modifying or expanding the concept of a migrant household in research approaches, meaning

scholars should include not only people who have migrated but also those with a 'migration experience'; migrants' spouses, children, and other relations impacted by migration and, ultimately, by xenophobia.

Panellists expressed optimism that xenophobia can be successfully addressed today. Multiple public 'spheres' exist - in which members of the public intersect - and failure to be open, progressive, and inclusive in one does not necessarily mean failure in all spheres.

## Climate Change and Human Mobility: New Perspectives on Climate and Migration, Displacement and Relocation

16 May 2017

### Panellists:

- **Dr Cosmin Corendea**, United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) - *Climate Change and human mobility: What lessons from regional approaches?*
- **Dr Tamer Afifi**, German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), former Senior Scientist at UNU-EHS - *Climate change-induced human displacement: From field to policy*
- **Dr Susana Adamo**, Centre for International Earth Science Information Network at the Earth Institute, Columbia - *Climate change, migration and sustainable development in South America: Conclusions of a regional seminar*
- **Prof Maxine Burkett**, University of Hawai'i at Manoa School of Law and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars - *Justice and Climate Migration: A View from The U.S. Pacific*

### Moderator:

- **Ms Julia Blocher**, United Nations University (UNU) Office in New York

### Introduction

Human mobility, climate change and the environment are interrelated. While a relatively new field in migration studies, the implications of this complex nexus had been considered by scholars and practitioners for over a decade. This seminar considered several issues related to how climatic and environmental changes interact with human mobility through the findings from empirical studies in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, North America and South America. Panellists offered expertise on different types of mobility that may be affected by climatic and environmental changes, namely migration, displacement and planned relocation, as well as to the reasons why people affected by the same stimuli do *not* always migrate.

These questions were discussed through research findings from case studies from East Africa and the Sahel (Lake Chad Basin, the Tillabéri region in Niger, eastern Tanzania); coastal and riverine Bangladesh; the U.S. Pacific (Majuro, Maloelap Atol and Mejit Islands in the Marshall Islands; and Oahu and Big Islands in Hawai'i); the continental U.S. (Ile de Jean Charles, Louisiana; and La Push, Hoh, Queets, and Taholah

Villages in Washington); and the Pacific Island States of Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu.

### *Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration*

Environmental degradation can influence the social, political and economic drivers of migration, altering people's ability to migrate. The impacts of climate change exacerbate and accelerate these drivers in complex ways. More people may be left without the resources to migrate, and rendered immobile or trapped in risky environments. Others may be compelled to migrate more frequently, to farther destinations, or more permanently, in search of natural resources and to find employment.

Panellists underlined the devastating effects of land degradation, drought and dryness on rural agricultural communities. Perversely, when people suffer from environmental degradation, they also accelerate the rate of human impact on environmental degradation, such as deforestation, due to the need to seek out new livelihoods. Overexploitation of the soils due to agricultural intensification, deforestation, and other causes of land degradation leads to a vicious cycle of environmental stresses. Common causes of overexploitation, combined with other anthropogenic factors such as pollution, compound climate-induced dryness in a worsening cycle.

Historically, relatively unhindered seasonal migration has been common across the world, as resource-dependent peoples followed the seasonal cycles of temperature and rainfall. In a warming world, such migration may become more long term. Due to the strength of environmental stressors, movements are no longer associated with seasonal events but rather the needs of livelihood-distressed households. This raises the likelihood that such movements – which are presently mainly internal – will become cross-border in the future. However, household characteristics and the attributes of individual household members are integral to migration decision-making. According to the results of another multi-country research project conducted in East Africa, survey respondents did not identify migration as the first or only adaptation strategy employed by the household in response to erratic rainfall. Many also noted other ways of diversifying their livelihoods, modification of crop preference, and reducing daily consumption of food for some or all members of the household. In the Lake Chad river basin, for example, land degradation and erosion has contributed to silting up with sand, which causes the river to become shallower. This leads to quicker and earlier drying of the lake overflow area and has negative effects on fish and food stocks.

One issue of common concern across case studies is how climate-related migration can deteriorate social and cultural integrity. For example, plans to relocate indigenous island communities away from their ancestral areas in the Marshall Islands have been strongly resisted by the at-risk communities themselves. The Marshallese islanders interviewed for the

project strongly resist the idea that the islands could become uninhabitable, and many see the risk of socio-cultural rupture from abandoning their home lands as more alarming. In Africa, the Boudouma tribes native to the Sahel used to identify strongly as cattle herders of *vache kouri*, a species of cattle that has almost died out as a result of worsening droughts. The species' endangerment contributed to the tribes' migration away from the area as well as a crisis of their localised identity.

Similar concerns emanated from research on coastal communities in Bangladesh. Expressions of place attachment are common among survey respondents, as a response from a fisherman exemplifies: "I know people are coming outside in our village and are saying that in few years there will be no Gabura [village] on the map, it will be disappeared under water.... [But] I would like to die at my birthplace. You know, when I smell the mud of my home I forget all my melancholies." Scholarly work has increasingly considered 'immobility' as a response to climate change, a point often absent from policy debates. Overall, 79% of people surveyed from 1,204 households in Bangladesh said they did not want to migrate away, even though they were aware of economic opportunities elsewhere.

The empirical evidence brought forward by the panellists underlined that socio-cultural integrity can be perceived by at-risk communities as greater or more pressing than the threats of land degradation and loss of land that may be propagated by climate change. This perspective was reinforced by a quote from a Bengali fisherman when asked if he would migrate in the face of mounting natural hazards: "Since I was born here, I am living with floods, coping with cyclones and fighting with hunger – where should I go? Migration is not the solution to me and my family."

Yet images of drowning islands remain in the popular media, and the issue of planning community relocations for potentially stateless populations is occasionally mooted in policy discussions. The insights brought forth by the panellists, however, suggest that the choice to leave or to stay is not simple or binary. When the risk perception of affected populations is nuanced, community-based responses are paramount.

#### *At Which Level are Policy Approaches Effective?*

The seminar provided an opportunity for scholars to share practical measures and good practices related to addressing communities affected by climate change. Panellists considered how regional, national and local level approaches could address climate related migration, how these approaches are linked, and what comparative advantages exist at each level.

Panellists agreed on the need for policy interventions to begin at the local and community levels. Community knowledge and participation are key to ensuring the success of such measures, for example, in ensuring solutions for at-

risk populations, protections for displaced people, planning relocations or resettlements for at-risk communities.

Panellists argued that while all forms of migration are multi-causal, climate-related migration may be considered differently from other 'types' of migration because it is the result of a series of economic and political decisions resulting in differential impacts across the globe. Many of these near- and long-term impacts have been discounted in the global political economy. That poor and vulnerable people in developing countries, who have contributed least to the problem – in particular, in coastal and island communities – carry a disproportionate burden of the impacts of climate change, is an injustice. Exploring the concept of 'climate migration' is an exercise that tends to lead to more tailored responses in order to ensure the rights protection of those unjustly affected.

Climate change may not be one of the most important drivers of population movement currently, even as it is already cited as one in the Pacific. However, climate change is not static, and the rate of change is increasing over time. The climate signal as a driver of migration may be entangled with other factors now, but may be stronger as a stand-alone factor in the future.

There is no theory of environmental rights that leads to environmental duties, and little jurisprudence on the environmental duties of states. Yet while the climate signal may be too trivial or difficult to parse, it has been recognised as something more than an 'act of God' or purely natural by member states through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The panel questioned how the progressive interrelation between climate change, human rights and human mobility advance the implementation of climate policies and how they can be effectively integrated into the implementation of existing mechanisms seeking to assist climate-related migration and displacement (the Paris Agreement, the non-economic component of the UNFCCC Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, the states-led Platform for Disaster Displacement). Ultimately, if the international community were to craft rights protection that adequately match the grievances of affected populations, there would be a question of whether such rights are individually and/or community-based. Some claims and grievances, as noted above, are made by individuals at the community level or by a community as a whole.

Today, panellists emphasised, governments and the international community have an opportunity to address the concerns of at-risk communities and minimise future harms of climate change. This would better be conducted in a reparative - rather than accommodating - manner with the full participation of the affected community.

Each study presented reinforced the necessity of community need for climate change solutions. Since the impacts of

climate change act as a risk multiplier, it affects people's livelihoods, health, food security, water security and human mobility – all of which are related to the basic rights to life, food, freedom of movement, and more. It is important that affected people's rights are safeguarded, including their controversial right to development.

In some communities, particularly those governed by customary law as in the Pacific, a basic understanding of human rights may not be coherent with a common institutional human rights perspective. Of survey respondents in Vanuatu, for example, over 70% were found to have a different cultural understanding of human rights, as compared with standards found in international law. This reality underscores the risks inherent in attempting to implement international legal frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement and the New York Declaration, at the local and community levels.

Policy interventions conceived at the international level occasionally contradict the solutions and approaches to the impacts of climate change already developed by affected communities, including migration. To best make these community-based solutions and approaches sustainable, however, they should be supported by a legal framework. The rule of law needs to be brought into the climate change process at the local, national and international levels in order to protect rights, reduce risk, build resilience, empower people, and facilitate positive migration. This will have the progressive dividend of reducing involuntary migration en masse.

Panelists noted that in the case of recurrent natural hazards, the households that moved away were the wealthiest, while under-resourced households became trapped in a spiral of vulnerability. The conditions of the household prior to migration determines how 'successful' the household will be in employing migration to attain greater income opportunities. Disaster-induced displacement is a situation that is ever more permanent for at-risk communities affected by structural inequality and battered by increasingly frequent and intense hazards. Furthermore, the poorly managed and sudden movement of people can also entail significant effects on surrounding ecosystems.

#### *Recommendations*

There are generally five pathways in which climate change can affect human mobility: sudden-onset disaster(s); slow-onset environmental degradation; destruction of Small Island States; designated Prohibited Areas (for Human Habitation); unrest, violence, or conflict (understood broadly) over resources. These point to the main areas for policy interventions, which should be tailored to specific contexts and informed by research.

To address slow-onset environmental degradation and 'distress migration', governments and international organisations can:

- Invest in land restoration irrigation projects to reduce the pressures of climate variability and dryness that can precipitate movement by livelihood-stressed populations.
- Better invest development aid; for example, by mainstreaming migration into development projects and ensuring a longer-term climate lens is taken in resilience-building projects. This can help ensure policy coherence of development interventions, while maximising benefits for target populations.

The risks of forced migration resulting from climate change impacts, such as social disarticulation and immobility, disproportionately affect island and coastal communities. Land use is identified as one of the priority areas where action can be taken. A global compact on migration could include:

- Member States' commitment to build on regional and bottom-up approaches.
- Assurances of right to stay, the right to land and resource use, and the continuity of community rights; these are all issues where customary law may prevail over other types of law, therefore community-specific and sensitive solutions are needed.
- Commitment at the regional and global level to support bottom-up solutions through adaptation financing and support, for example, for National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).
- Reinforcements of institutional and infrastructural development aiming to reduce livelihood vulnerability to natural hazards.

The panel advocated for a reconciliation of the disconnect between the current body of research and policy making in this field for example, through:

- Better inclusion of policymakers in multiple stages of project design and development.
- Policy makers can be clearer with researchers about their priorities.
- A greater encouragement of involvement by the private sector, particularly in terms of meeting the technical and financial challenges of climate change adaptation.

More interdisciplinary research is needed to understand the complex and multi-causal links between climate change and human mobility, including the indirect impacts of climate change. Greater attention to household surveys and focus groups may be needed in the case of slow-onset events. This should include longitudinal research designs, albeit costly and time consuming, to better research migration through a systems approach. In the case of displacements, it is crucial to analyse the temporality of movements: how long migrants are away for, how these temporalities are determined by a strategy in each household, and if and how large-scale migratory flows can be reversed.

With a better understanding of differential risk exposure – as climate change and variability particularly affects the

poorest people, particularly women, children, the elderly – a better comprehension of the relationship between population movements and climate change vulnerability as well as adaption may be possible. Panellists concurred that understanding migration necessitates understanding why people do not want to leave and help governments work to foster the right to stay. Such efforts should address not only the causes of the movements, but also the factors that explain why people are tied to certain places.

Panellists cautioned against directly associating migration with climate change, but supported efforts to translate global climate phenomena into regional or local level impacts. Due to the uncertainties of down-scaling global climate impacts, more research and cross-fertilisation with natural scientists would be beneficial.

Human mobility related to unrest, conflict or violence over scarce resources did not feature strongly in the discussion, and the link is tenuously drawn in most scholarly work.

## Cities of Welcome: Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Urban Areas

8 June 2017

### Panellists:

- Prof C. Cindy Fan, Professor in the Department of Geography and Vice Provost for International Studies and Global Engagement, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
- Prof Ayse Caglar, Professor in the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology, University of Vienna
- Prof Loren Landau, South African Research Chair for Mobility and the Politics of Difference, African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) at the University of Witwatersrand
- Dr Megha Amrith, Research Fellow, United Nations United Nations University Institute on Globalisation, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM)

### Moderator:

- Dr James Cockayne, Head of the United Nations University (UNU) Office in New York

### Introduction

This panel gathered experts from diverse backgrounds to explore questions related to the inclusion and integration of migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees in cities around the world. Panellists were asked to consider questions such as: What is the role of local government and governance in migration – how do cities sustain ‘cultures of welcome’ in the face of hostile national and international rhetoric?

Panellists discussed examples of cities looking to cultivate a ‘culture of welcome’. This term loosely refers to a culture that fosters an appreciation of and empathy for the situations asylum seekers and refugees find themselves in, provides them with safety, and seeks to welcome them into active participation in community life.

Independent of national prerogatives, cities play a role in terms of welcoming documented and undocumented migrants and ensuring their access to urban life, community spaces, and services. Fostering a ‘culture of welcome’ is not a simple matter of enacting policies to protect the human rights of migrants. The panel also considered the characters of urban society and of ‘urban citizens’, and the many facets of urban societies in which migrants play important, and variable, roles.

### *The World's Cities: Front Lines of Migrant Inclusion and Integration*

At the outset of the event, panellists sought to lay out a number of different perspectives on the theme in question, drawing from different disciplines and academic debates on inclusion of migrants and refugees in urban spaces.

Migration both within and across international borders is a story that plays out tangibly in the world's cities. Migration is not an abstract concept, it represents the integration or inclusion of people into a new community, and very often into urban areas where the opportunity of employment brings people of all backgrounds. Movements to cities may in part reflect vast regional and global inequalities, but also represent new livelihood possibilities, and opportunities to develop solidarities that cut across national, ethnic or religious lines.

Yet, experiences of urban migration are diverse and situated within a wider global perspective. Cities do not make policy choices in isolation; they are also affected by dynamics at the national and international levels. Services offered by local authorities are often dependent on funding streams approved at provincial or federal levels. Yet even in the face of restrictions and budget limitations mandated at the federal level, local authorities are responsible for meeting the needs of resident migrants' basic services, long-term and adequate housing, employment and education. In addition, the toxic rhetoric against migration extends beyond geographic boundaries in our highly-networked world, meaning external actors have the potential to drive opposition to cities' innovative policies.

In many contexts, local governments are influential actors, positioning themselves as open to migrants and actively developing policies of inclusion in opposition to state rhetoric. In other contexts, municipalities are under-resourced or absent, and grassroots movements and migrants' social networks play more important roles in negotiating belonging; albeit in fragmented ways, as migrants continue to confront everyday borders and invisibility in urban spaces.

Migrant families are sometimes separated by distances, and those distances may be within or across the political borders of a state. This was raised in the frame of translocal and transnational families. The realities of local/translocal experiences of migration on the ground, panellists argued, urge us to move beyond a purely state-centric lens on migration governance. Families negotiate distance and boundary lines (e.g., the rural-urban divide) in maintaining and imagining ‘family’ – and, by extension, ‘community’. The family members that migrate as well as the family members left behind (although this term is a contentious one) must be considered in a holistic fashion to understand how migration processes contribute to social and economic change. The nexus between the migrants and those left behind, and the ties that bind them – i.e. social and family ties, economic ties

via remittances – is a useful analytical framework to consider migration and refugee movements to cities.

#### *All Cities Were Built by Migrants*

Panellists noted that migrants connect or re-connect the world's cities, contributing significantly to the connecting and strengthening of networks of power. Migrants do this in many ways, and perhaps most clearly because migrants will typically use small urban areas as springboards to larger cities, or to cities abroad. Cities, as mentioned in the introduction to the event, are the primary hosting places of migrants and refugees.

Migrants and refugees re-empower cities, especially declining cities, by attracting new investment, business leaders, and entrepreneurs. Migrants are often the drivers of urban regeneration, in part because they settle in areas that were previously in decline. Importantly, they consume goods and services, create businesses, and strengthen or create new trade networks - for example through the so-called 'nostalgia trade'. Migrants are sometimes characterised as entrepreneurial by definition.

Overall, panellists underlined migrants were the initial builders of cities and today drive urban regeneration. They further emphasised the point that how leaders frame welcoming and unwelcoming in cities is very important. Studies have shown the multiple ways in which migrants contribute to the multi-faceted city-making. There are numerous social and economic dividends earned from diversity and inclusion.

The panel considered migration as it contributes to the social and economic transformation of cities, as well as their 're-empowerment'. One panellist provided evidence that in cities around the world, migration-friendly narratives are closely enmeshed with business-friendly narratives. In many cities, various programmes and initiatives were predominantly designed to promote start-up businesses. While migrants were not necessarily entrepreneurial by culture or background, these initiatives provided migrants the ability to become entrepreneurs. Migrants become important to business-friendliness of cities – and, in so doing, must fight against negative narratives.

The fault lines between 'locals' and the 'other' very often are more visible in 'disempowered' cities. In cities, migrant-friendly narratives did not devolve into policy, but the business-friendly narratives did devolve into relevant policies: tax cuts, integration activities, *inter alia*. Building of migrant-friendly and business-friendly cities depends very much on public funding. There is no correlation between public revenue streams and urban regeneration; indeed, regeneration projects can leave cities with even fewer resources for public services. This is because when migrants, refugees and impoverished people become assets to access funding, those finances are channelled into the coffers of developers and public-private partners. The result is an increase in poverty and inequality.

However, migrants and refugees often find commonalities with displaced and dispossessed native residents. Their lack of resources and common marginalisation helps open spaces for collaboration due to common situations of precariousness.

Many of these points were adopted into a discussion on the specific case of African migrants in South Africa. Panellists noted that governments do very little to promote inclusion in spite of the fact that massive cultural diversity is the norm in many African cities, while at the same time, there tends to be exclusion among ethnic groups in other public spaces.

'Migration' has, for many, become an umbrella term that includes refugees as a sub-category. However, that may not hold up empirically in some parts of the world, especially across much of Africa; for whatever reason you flee, or even if you just choose to live in cities, you end up often in the same conditions. Refugees, as international migrants and often with significant resources, are not necessarily an especially vulnerable group. In South Africa, for example, migrants (who come from the rural hinterland) are far more vulnerable than the international migrants (who are usually not expelled and may not face the same levels of destitution).

#### *Inclusion for whom?*

Panellists noted that the term 'host population', often used in relation to migrants and refugees, is misleading and open to interpretation. In African cities, the majority of the population are from rural areas or from other provinces. The concepts of 'inclusion and 'integration' as they are usually being referred to in policy debates are rendered reductive, as populations are *building* new 'places' at the same time as 'including' more newly arrived people from elsewhere.

Panellists pointed out the questions of scale in inclusion and integration in cities, namely that people exist in multiple public spaces simultaneously. The city community is one level, while people also associate with each other at smaller levels, such as in their neighbourhood. It is important to be aware of the sub-city level: some districts are either ignored or out of the control of governments. Some are places of violence and disorder (e.g. some slums, ghettos) while some are extraordinarily peaceful and organised (e.g. some favelas). Overall, there are deeply heterogeneous rules and regulations at the sub-city level that have implications for inclusion and integration. Integration policies should therefore be targeted at different scales and sub-city levels, as proposed by many municipal governments and by UN-Habitat.

Migration to urban areas, panellists noted, is often related to the draw of employment. In many parts of Africa, this is of particular importance as cities were not originally built to house Africans but to hold the colonial structure and institutions, i.e., they were places of work and not living spaces. This dynamic partially helped account for anti-urbanisation campaigns in some countries until recently.

A key case study of migration of Chinese citizens from rural to urban areas, and the barriers that they face in doing so, was cited. The panel noted that since China's State Council announced in 2014 that new *hukou* (Household Registration) aimed at enabling 100 million rural Chinese to settle in towns and cities, rural migrants' response to *hukou* reforms have been less than enthusiastic. On the contrary, most migrants opt for straddling and circulating between the city and countryside rather than giving up their rural *hukou* and settling down in cities. Panellists argued that China's urbanisation policy should take multi-locality seriously and should focus on migrants' livelihood and well-being in cities rather than on *hukou* conversion alone.

#### *Recommendations*

Ultimately, inclusion is a term that requires better definition. The concept has some normative and philosophical foundations which don't necessarily correspond with what city residents and migrants want. It was underlined that many migrants either don't self-identify as such or prefer not to be identified as such, and thus shy away from programmes targeting migrant inclusion. They may prefer to remain invisible. In addition, migrants often invest in the place where they are from or where they plan to go to, and do not intend to settle down and participate in plans to integrate or include them, no matter what the ultimate outcome is.

Considering these points, panellists suggested policies for inclusion and integration look at places rather than people. Transnationality and multi-locality should be embraced, not just as a fact but as a positive, enriching element of citizens' lives and of urban identities. National and municipal governments can work to build stronger communities, solidarities and convivial spaces among all inhabitants, in places where migrants live, rather than targeting specific programmes to 'migrants' or 'refugees'.

In addition, some thought needs to be invested in how to promote a 'culture of welcome' within spaces where the reach of governmental programmes may be limited, and to thus not only look at 'the city' as a singular entity but to work with and recognise the diversity and heterogeneity of communities, voices, actors and forms of governance at the urban level in different contexts across the world.

## Addressing Women's Rights in a Global Compact on Migration<sup>4</sup>

22 June 2017

### Panellists:

- Ms **Mónica Corona**, JASS (Just Associates) Board of Directors
- Dr **Francisco Cos-Montiel**, Senior Research Officer at the UNU Institute for Globalisation, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM)
- Dr **Jenna Hennebry**, Director, International Migration Research Centre and Associate Professor, Communication Studies and Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Dr **Annabelle Wilkins**, Research Fellow, WORKANDHOME project at the University of Southampton, Department of Geography and Environment

### Moderator:

- Dr **James Cockayne**, Head of the United Nations University (UNU) Office in New York
- Dr **Purna Sen**, Director, Policy Division, UN Women

### Introduction

In an age of unprecedented human mobility within and between countries, women are migrating more frequently for work and other reasons, to more destinations, and in greater numbers than ever before. Currently women represent 48% of all global migrants. A global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration should acknowledge women's choices to migrate and the immense contributions made by migrant women to sustainable development and social change in countries of origin, transit and destination.

This multi-disciplinary panel identified actions and strategies that member states and other stakeholders can take to promote and protect women's human rights in migration governance, and in particular the global compact for migration. The panel also identified interventions that enable or constrain women's enjoyment of their human rights, both among those who migrate and those who stay behind.

Panellists reflected on how states can best develop gender-responsive, human rights-based migration policies which recognise the choices women make in migration, promote their empowerment and leadership and moves away from addressing migrant women primarily through a lens of helpless victims. Panellists considered questions such as: How can states ensure that policies, legal frameworks, and programmes address gender-based discrimination and violence against migrant women in their development and

implementation? What are the measures, conditions and mechanisms in which migration contributes the most positively to the lives of women who move and who stay behind, for example through access to decent work, public services and social protection? In what ways can fair and dignified working conditions be assured for women migrant workers, particularly those working in sectors that are undervalued and susceptible to exploitation?

### *Empowering Women Migrant Workers*

Panellists vehemently underlined a need to move away from a negative discourse on migrant women. Currently, including in international discussions, the focus tends to be on the negative aspects of migration in destination countries. Instead, we should focus on the ways in which migration offers women empowerment. Women migrant workers make a choice to improve their lives as migration often benefits their families as well as countries of origin and destination.

Tabulating the impacts of women migrants leads to a list of overwhelmingly positive outcomes. The development benefits of migration are well documented, including the transfer of economic remittances, which often exceeded foreign investment and Official Development Assistance (ODA). Though women migrant workers are likely to earn less than men, they have been found to remit higher proportions of their earnings and at more stable and regular intervals when compared to men. Furthermore, women's remittances are often used to invest in the well-being of the family and community. Women migrant workers also often fill care gaps in destination countries which helps to stimulate economic growth. Panellists stressed the importance of social remittances, including empowerment, skills, new earning capacity, elevated status and progressive attitudes, and expressed that these can be seen as more sustainable and impactful on development indicators. Panellists stressed that women migrants are in some ways not vulnerable, but rather dare to break the cycle of poverty. One panellist furthermore underscored the importance of inclusion of migrant women broadly, and migrant women workers in particular, in the implementation of the SDGs moving forward.

Issues that are unique or pronounced among women migrant workers in the global south, as compared to those in the global north - and those connecting both, or in transit - were raised. In the case of Mexico and Myanmar, it was noted that women migrant workers are also migrants in transition. They may be in transition to other destinations, as in the case of Mexico, or in a temporary situation for bigger aspirations, as in the case of Myanmar and many others. The concept of "home" may be a symbol, experience, practice, and lens as well as a conveyor of a sense of belonging or not belonging in a destination country

Empirical research suggests that women migrant workers from Myanmar see their migration to Thailand as temporary access to education and work. One panellist noted Myanmar's

transition to a civilian government in 2010, and stressed that many human rights concerns in the country still exist. Aspects of ethnographic research were shared that focused on ethnic minorities and women and the home. Some of the hardships that women migrants from Myanmar experience, such as battling with their identity, heightened discrimination and avoidance of the police. The panel underlined the change of view that many migrants also experienced including the illumination of women's rights.

The issue of migrants in transition is germane to research on Central American women migrants in Mexico. One panellist focusing on this issue noted that at the Southern border, women migrants have inserted themselves into the labour market primarily into domestic and agricultural work. The primary objective of many of these women is to temporarily work in Mexico and then continue their migration journey to the U.S. It was underlined that women migrate from Central America for a variety of reasons including gun violence, sexual and gender-based violence, and climate change. She explained that due to the influx of women migrant workers at the southern boarder there have been new ways of working developed, such as Guatemalan women working to pick tropical fruits. It was stressed that returnees must have access to gender-specific services. Panellists emphasized that researchers and policymakers should focus on the various and specific profiles of women.

Panellists underlined that there are many blind spots in understanding women and migration due to a lack of data. Yet data is a powerful tool to make women visible. The discussion covered various data and measurement issues including availability and transparency, definitional problems, inconsistencies, limitations in geography and the politics of collecting migration data. Migration counts and figures are usually underestimated, informal workers are usually not counted and estimating trafficking is difficult. While there is no silver bullet answer to these questions, better engagement across states as well as with experts from academia, civil society and the UN can help to improve data collection, retention, and use. Panellists made the plea that 'data matters'.

### *Recommendations*

Panellists underlined several key recommendations, focusing on points that could be integrated into a global compact on migration.

Women on the move should not be portrayed exclusively or predominantly as victims (of trafficking), poor and vulnerable, or involved in criminality (migrant smuggled). It is essential to recognise and normalise migrant women as agents for development for the societies they bridge. Women's choices must be emphasised for both personal and collective goals.

Choice necessarily implies alternatives, the ability to have chosen otherwise. Policies can support women migrants in

making better choices through the migration cycle by, for instance, providing essential resources such as a basic income, a social protection regime for those who are left behind in their countries of origin and basic safety across migration corridors. But also, policy has the potential to provide other, less tangible resources. For example, (formal and informal) education and access to information that include positive images of women migrants add to their sense of self-worth and perceived ability to integrate into labour markets. These two kinds of resources can also improve women migrants' lifestyle choices (including where to live, whether to marry and to whom, whether to have children, how many children to have, how to raise children), freedom of movement, and choice of friends. All of these points are critical for people to live the lives they want. Children and women should not be conflated in discussions on protections and empowerment, and the rights and agency of children must be recognised and supported.

Women migrant workers are overly represented in jobs involving routine tasks. This contributed to rendering them more at risk for job loss as automation progresses. In designing and promoting education and skill development programmes for women, governments and partners should take this into account. Protections for migrant women, particularly those in certain sectors, can be improved.

Finally, data measurement tools and consistency of data measurement across member states can be improved. This will help improve the invisibility of some migrant women.

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<sup>2</sup> This event was co-organised by UN University and UN Women. Sincere thanks to Layla Mohseni, Inkeri von Hase, and Michael Stewart-Evans for their collaboration for the event and in the preparation of this summary.

## Alternative Ways of Thinking about Migration for Development: Lessons from Emerging Research

12 July 2017

### Panellists:

- Prof Ibrahim Awad, Professor of global affairs, Director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies in the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at The American University in Cairo
- Dr Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Migration Research Fellow in the Politics and Governance Programme, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
- Dr Manuel Orozco, Director of Migration, Remittances and Development at the Inter-American Dialogue
- Prof Melissa Siegel, Professor and Head of Migration Studies at the United Nations University - Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT)

### Chair:

- Dr James Cockayne, Head of the United Nations University (UNU) Office in New York

### Introduction

New global realities warrant taking stock of new ways of thinking about the relationship between migration and sustainable development, pushing the limits of knowledge on the role of migration in promoting skills transfers, in addressing global labour market imbalances, and in enhancing the benefits of globalisation. This seminar offered empirical evidence, practical examples and critical perspectives on the developmental impacts of migration.

This event encouraged discussion of a number of questions, such as: what are the socio-economic effects of the increasing magnitude of migration between developing countries (South-South migration). How do refugees contribute to the infrastructure, economies, and social fabric of their host communities? What factors and behavioural biases influence financial decision-making, for example, a migrant's decision to remit, save, adopt technologies, or invest in productive assets or intangible assets (such as health and education)? Finally, within regional structures supporting freedom of movement – such as the European Union and the Economic Community of West African States – how does the existence of different categories of migrants affect their access to labour opportunities, services and rights?

### *Reconciling the Global North and South to Joint Policy Formulation*

Migration in today's interconnected world cannot be considered in terms of bilateral flows. Many of the strengths in migration come from their transnational and complex connections. Yet our global migration governance system – or lack thereof – is largely based on bilateral and multilateral agreements among governments. When it comes to considering the links between migration and development, the discussion inevitably must include an approach taken jointly among origin, transit, and destination countries. It is well recognised that the distinction between these three 'types' is artificial, as most countries today simultaneously have elements of two or three of these.

Panellists noted that when it comes to migration, countries of origin and destination each have their own interests and objectives in labour migration, which may be divergent. For example, labour migration in the Euro-Mediterranean region often puts Southern and Northern European countries at odds with countries of origin for unauthorised migrants arriving in Europe.

European countries confront a number of political realities resulting from public perceptions of these migrant flows, while African countries are concerned with the human rights of their citizens as well as the average of 2 - 6% of GDP from remittances. For example, while a majority of North and West African countries have ratified or acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), no western European countries have done so.

European countries have tended to exercise their ability to recruit migrants based on the criteria they set, while many African countries have espoused the benefits of easy labour migration and advocated for the rights of migrants. When it comes to international labour migration, panellists argued, countries of the global south could be characterised as policy 'takers' while countries in the global north are policy 'makers'. However, the two sets of countries have a convergent interest in maximising the realisation of their own objectives, which can be achieved through the joint formulation of policies.

Panellists also acknowledged the rising prevalence of 'aid to reduce migration' around the world, whether through funds directly for employment projects, awareness raising efforts (typically alerting the public to the dangers of unauthorised migration, or of the risks faced upon arrival), or development cooperation grants. However, it was generally agreed that these efforts do not 'reduce' migration. Three reasons for that were identified. Firstly, information and communications around projects funded this way are flawed. Little information about these programmes flows down to households, and thus are unlikely to influence migrant decisions. In one example, most Syrian refugees in Jordan interviewed for a survey were

completely unaware of an initiative through which they could receive work permits. Secondly, the nature of jobs created through aid programmes did not always occur quickly. In addition, they may not help meet the aspirations of the people they target, who have potentially invested significant personal and community resources into migration. Some jobs were not necessarily linked to specific skill set requirements and perceptions, such as whether they would be accessible geographically, enable family unity, or were perceived as demeaning. Finally, host communities, and disadvantaged groups within them, are often not taken into consideration in aid programmes. Differential treatment between migrant or refugee and 'host' communities can give rise to social tensions. In addition, host communities are integral to the rule of law, perceptions of security, and drive the governance and institution building that are key to job creation and uptake.

Building on these concerns around migration-specific development aid, panellists noted there is often a disconnect between development programmes and strategies that can significantly impact migration. While many international and civil society organisations pursue a scaling-up approach, at the programme level there can be a disconnect, because aid is political. Panellists advocated for a development strategy that integrates a migration strategy. Such a strategy would recognise the wide array of development impacts migration has on host and home countries; for example, research shows that financial inclusion through transnational families increases the financial (and social) complexity in a migrant sending area and contributes to long-term economic development. The outcomes can include greater upward mobility, quality of life, and freedom of choice for target communities.

#### *Beyond Migration for (Economic) Development*

Panellists also argued that migration and development cannot be solely about economic growth. The impacts of credit access, improved savings retention, education, and so-called 'social remittances' - knowledge transfers, building of social capital, and the enrichment of the 'knowledge economy' - are important, if not more important for sustainable development. Networks between transnational families create more opportunities for migration and thus more opportunities for human growth in all communities involved. Yet the impact of migration on economic and financial growth cannot be understated, for example: the impact of financial remittances, migrant entrepreneurship, migrant philanthropy and investment in host and home communities, and the development of 'nostalgia trade' networks.

Furthermore, the discussion focused on the understated impacts of refugees in development. In several empirical studies presented - most conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa in settlement settings, not looking urban refugee integration *per se* - the outcomes of refugee influx are positive economically, albeit nuanced. Positive socio-economic outcomes were measured through key indicators such as income, nutrition, and the quality of housing and productive assets. Overall,

it was found that refugee settlements breathe new life and dynamism into the local and regional economy of the adjacent communities. This is in part due to consumer demand and in part due to infrastructure projects that often accompany refugee settlements.

However, it was noted that there are often 'winners' and 'losers' in migration and refugee movements. Migration (in the broad sense) can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. For some already less-advantaged groups, such as low-wage, low-skilled workers, refugee movements increase competition. Already privileged groups are often able to take advantage; for example, skilled workers have benefited from aid agencies coming in due to the opportunities to work for internationally-funded programmes.

However, it was noted that the perceptions of how refugee influx can affect local economies is often overblown. While in some places refugees are taken as a new form of cheap labour and thus can have wage effects on the local labour market, particularly for low-skilled work such as on farms, the story does not end there. Refugees are not necessarily 'taking' jobs, but helping economies to expand. Local workers are more able to profit from new employment opportunities and attain better-paid work.

#### *Recommendations*

Overall, panellists suggested that it is time to dispense with the perception of 'managing migration' as dirty words among civil society - insofar as 'managing migration' is not perceived by governments as synonymous with 'reducing' migration. Migration can be better harnessed to deliver on the sustainable development agenda. For a global compact on migration, this may include lowering the barriers to [legal] migration, for example by lowering the financial costs of recruitment and of the migration journey. Information sharing and awareness raising about economic opportunities for both hosting and hosted communities - and, in particular, about employment opportunities and the risks involved in migration - can be improved through modern communications tools and strategies. Improving the right to work for both refugees and migrants, and portability of rights, are prerequisites to ensuring the full potential of migration to expand economies, for the benefit of all communities concerned. To ensure development programmes do not have harmful and unintended effects on migrant families, panellists advocated for sounder development strategies. This could include mainstreaming migration or scaling-up relevant projects into development planning.

While countries of the global south may have historically been policy 'takers' while countries in the global north are policy 'makers', the two sets of countries have a convergent interest in maximising the realisation of their own objectives. This can be achieved through the joint formulation of policies, whether bilateral, multilateral, or global in nature (or all of the above). A greater recognition of the important economic

contributions and human growth potential delivered through transnational families, social remittances, knowledge transfers and the entrepreneurial, investing, philanthropic migrants is paramount. To facilitate these, policies can be formulated to ensure communities around the world can access and integrate into credit markets. Availability and access to microfinance and financial tools such as mobile wallets have assisted these efforts.

A number of recommendations addressed development cooperation and aid programmes targeting the 'root causes' of migration. For refugee and migrant households to make informed decisions, information should be shared in clear, transparent ways. Host communities must be engaged early and often in development and aid programming. In many cases, 'host' communities should be able to access projects to avoid distrust or resentment - for example, with nutrition, health, skills training, and employment projects.

On the role of refugees in development, the discussants underlined the need for more rational economic planning, while balancing emotional tensions. Refugees should not be seen as threats. They should be recognised as important economic agents. It should also be noted that communities adjacent to refugee settlements don't always objectively think their situation has improved, in part due to mistrust of outsiders; such subjectivity can lead to tensions and resentment. To counter these issues, awareness-raising about refugees and benefits to supporting refugees is important. Countering discrimination against migrants and refugees should underlie the points outlined above.